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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes recommendations from and actions taken as a result of the 1996 Caribbean Conference on the Rights of the Child. It also presents the tasks for the Second Conference on Early Childhood Education in the Caribbean related to supporting Caribbean early childhood initiatives. Section 1 of the paper considers whether participating countries have the necessary legislation and planning capacity for early childhood initiatives, and notes the importance of taking a collaborative approach, defining responsibilities of parents and governments, providing national standards and guidelines, and developing planning capacity for early childhood education and development (ECED). Section 2 discusses main considerations in proposing legislation and planning in ECED, including considering a regional approach to mitigate the expense involved, making legislative links with other laws affecting young children or affecting the social and economic climate, developing planning capacity for very young children, and planning for social and economic supports. Section 3 describes current ECED provisions in Caribbean nations, notes the importance of grounding ECED services in local cultures, and creating a climate to promote ECED. Section 4 considers the issues in promoting ECED services, including supporting and raising consciousness about ECED in new parents, starting ECED intervention in the first year of life for a maximum benefit to the child, sustaining ECED supports to children and families before preschool, and prioritizing quality improvements in preschool services. Section 5 examines how ECED is currently being supported and sustained in the Caribbean, including using an integrated approach, designating budgets and planning ECED investment, and monitoring, evaluating, and training for ECED quality. (KB)

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From Belize to Barbados: affording children their rights from Birth

Introduction: a social partnership approach in the Caribbean

For those of you who attended the Caribbean Conference on the Rights of the Child, held in Belize City in October last year, you will be aware of the considerable commitments that Governments in the Region made to specific actions to improve their countries' capacities to meeting obligations to children under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In a process of tutorials, conference participants identified critical steps for child protection and care, amongst which was the role of day care in the lives of young children, and their families. Some very interesting recommendations were made. First, participants noted that whether or not day care was privately run (such as in home based day care) there should still be an involvement by the community and the government:

> " because after all the care and protection of children is *everybody's business*"[1] (p.52) (my emphasis)

In the same session, participants also recommended that training be provided not only to caregivers and teachers in child care settings, but also to parents "because the *parent is the child's first teacher*". The theme of comprehensive involvement was emphasised in the recommended supports for child care services from health staff and community workers, and from government in the form of financial subsidy and standards setting; in addition:

> "We saw it necessary, as a group, to ensure that *all the social partners* were involved: the private sector, who may contribute materials for either construction or renovation, the members of the community to ensure that standards are adhered to" (ibid) (my emphasis)

These recommendations were made in the context of an exploration of child care and protection concerns. In most parts of the world, the recommendations that tend to follow are usually separate from recommendations that relate to the education of the child, or to the economic or social circumstances of a community, and instead tend to identify a need for a social welfare service for the child. What is very interesting in these recommendations is the way in which participants in this region are thinking:

1. Day care is seen as a matter of concern for everyone in the society, not a private family need met by any means that a family can afford; and society here is seen as a combination of forces within the community and government
2. Training must include all those involved, and in particular the parent because he or she is seen as the first educator of the child
3. Day care requires support from a social partnership of those with economic concerns such as the vested interests the private sector and government have in stability and productivity; governmental concerns for the safety and viability of services to children, which require standards and monitoring in order to be effective; community concerns for the health and development of children; and family concerns for their individual sons and daughters.

[1] UNICEF CAO, (1996) The Report of the Caribbean Conference on the Rights of the Child, Bridgetown, Barbados

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Our brief: supporting early childhood initiatives in the Region

Here in Barbados, in this Second Conference on Early Childhood Education in the Caribbean, we are being asked to consider early childhood education in its broadest sense to incorporate the development of the very young child from birth; the role of all educators of the child including parents and media and other influences in society; and the ways in which social partnerships can be forged to produce early childhood services for children.

It is because the brief is so broad that we have also needed to define the concept and approach that you will hear in this paper, and that you will hear and see reflected or contested in a number of papers and contributions in this conference:

1. Using the term Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED)

We will be using the term Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) to incorporate the meanings in initiatives and services for children from birth to school age. To shorten this to ECE would tend to make us think of pre school services alone; to shorten this to ECD might make us seem to exclude them. In some countries the acronym is broadened further to include Care; we have not done so here because we want Care to be seen in a dynamic way as integral both to education and development. Care on its own has tended not to imply a similar dynamic and sense of process as the other two terms, but rather a sense of stasis or custodianship.

2. Developing the framework in the Draft plan of Action

We will be exploring the situations affecting ECED in the region within the same framework as the UNICEF CAO proposed Draft Plan of Action for Caribbean Countries. As you know the Draft Plan of Action is designed as a tool to assist countries to plan ECED activities. In using the same framework, we hope to be contributing in a logical way to a process of consideration of the issues so as not to confuse the development of Country based planning.

3. Assisting country based analysis of ECED

We will also be setting out an analytical structure into which, having examined the trends affecting the Caribbean Region, you will be able to locate your own Country's data sets and responses to the UNICEF CAO questionnaire. We are not in a position to offer you an analysis of your own country's ECED planning and implementation at this stage but hope that you will find the examples from individual countries, and the analysis of trends, useful for interpreting the situation as you monitor and evaluate it in your own country.

First steps: do we have the necessary legislation and planning capacity?

First we look at statements made to the Belize Conference on the legislative framework and planning capacity for children, and specifically for early childhood, of individual participating countries in the Region.

1. Taking a collaborative approach in the Region

A recommendation of the Belize conference was for a collaborative approach between countries to take forward the legislative and institutional measures needed for compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Child. This approach might call on the legal facilities of CARICOM to carry out studies in Member States "to bring about some form of uniformity in the various bits of legislation which deal with the rights of children" (ibid, p.55). Also, it might be united with the OECS initiative mentioned in the Statement from Dominica (ibid, p139) to draft a model Education Act for improving the quality of education of children.

2. Creating a new vision for children in legislation

However there was recognition at the Belize Conference that the potential of legislation to shape rights and expectations in a society would take considerably more thought than compiling what already existed with amendments and revisions necessary to ensure compliance with the Convention. The capacity of legislation to move a society into a new vision and understanding, to enable and empower persons to act in their own interests, is created when rights and duties are framed not only to protect persons but to mobilise and promote new ways of being. The group reporting on legislative and institutional measures at the Conference agreed on the need for all legislation to :

> "be brought under the umbrella of a single welfare act, for example, a Children's Act" (ibid p 55)

3. The lack of legislation framing ECED service development

How would this development assist the process of ECED in countries in the Region? It would enable us to help one another to fill a gap which exists in every country that participated at Belize, a gap created by the lack of legislative framework for conceptualising, enabling and providing comprehensive early childhood services. In the Country statements annexed to the Belize Conference Report, each country indicated their legislative planning. Some countries have indicated the need for legislation to govern the **protection of children at risk**, specifying in clear terms the statutory responsibilities of the State, responsibilities which may include the need to establish provisions to ensure adequate day care (Grenada, Suriname). Others are more concerned with **the legal status of the child**; Montserrat plans to table a Status of Children Act this year, and Dominica, Guyana and the Turks and Caicos Islands identified needs for improvements on legal child status.

Trinidad and Tobago identified the need specifically to legislate to **regulate child care facilities**. In Belize, there are plans by the National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC) to advocate for enabling legislation to ensure the provision of child care and day care services including attention to subsidiary arrangements to improve affordability for low income families, and to facilitate the entry of more women into the work force.

In Belize, a project to consult on, research and draft a Families and Children Act is being undertaken by the NCFC, the Ministry of Human Resources, UNICEF and the National Childrens Home Action for Children in the UK. Amongst other goals, the proposed Act is intended to promote **the Child's role in decision making** to foster their capacity to grant informed consent as stipulated in the Convention. This is a difficult area for enforcement in early childhood, but it can lead to the development of advocacy services for children particularly those caught in difficult circumstances in which no adult can be said to be speaking for them separate from their own immediate interests.

4. Defining responsibility of parent and government

Also, Trinidad and Tobago are considering further amendments to the Children (Amendment) Act 1994 to include "making better provisions for the rights and incidents of parenthood and guardianship and for parental responsibility" (ibid, p.126). This would be an important step in identifying what is meant by parental responsibility; how far parental responsibility extends for the development of a child from birth, and what the governmental responsibilities are to provide support for the families and specific interventions for the protection of the child's interests.

5. Leadership for ECED in national groupings

Several countries have identified key committees or non governmental organisations which are leading the development of policy issues and programmes in early childhood on behalf of the country. Several

have done so within the context of committees established to formulate National Plans of Action for the implementation of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s (Guyana, Jamaica). In Trinidad and Tobago there is a National Council for Early Childhood Care and Education. In Montserrat, a proposal to establish a Child Advocacy Board has been submitted to the Honourable Attorney General. If established, the Board will have responsibility for identifying areas for legal reform and for making necessary recommendations. In Belize there is the National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC) which has become the government's main advisory body in relation to issues dealing with families and children. The Belize NCFC has ensured that it has the mechanisms in place for establishing social partnerships: its members include the Cabinet Secretary, Heads of Social Sector Government Departments, representatives of NGOs, Churches, the Business Community and appropriate Educational Institutions and International Bodies. With UNICEF/Belize's financial support and technical assistance, a Secretariat headed by a paid Executive Secretary and support staff was put in place to coordinate the work of the NCFC on a daily basis.

6. Providing national standards and guidelines

In Belize, the NCFC in collaboration with a number of agencies has researched and published a Survey of Day Care Centres in Belize City, Burrell Boom and Ladyville, and an Operational Manual and a Training Manual for Day Care Providers. In Jamaica, following a national survey of Day Care Centres undertaken by the Caribbean Child Development Centre with support from UNICEF, the Day Care Unit of Children's Services has drafted standards for the service which are currently before parliament.

7. Developing planning capacity in ECED

In Trinidad and Tobago, the Research, Planning and Implementation Division of the Ministry of Social Development has played a critical role in respect of policy formulation. This Division is trying to develop a focused and **integrated approach to addressing children's issues**, and trying to ensure that programmes promoting children's rights are incorporated into national development strategies as integral components. However, one of the constraints is the **limitations in respect of continuous statistical and other data** to inform policy formulation and the lack of financial and human resources allocated specifically for this purpose. In Trinidad and Tobago and in Belize, **Family Services Divisions** have been established to strengthen the government's capabilities to make integrated interventions and to avoid duplication or collision of efforts across Ministries.

Main considerations in taking forward legislation and planning in ECED

1. Legislation is expensive: consider a regional approach

In the UNICEF CAO Draft plan of action, legislation for children from birth to school entry which enshrines their rights, and identifies clearly the responsibilities of the parent and the State in ensuring these rights, is proposed as a priority goal. Some countries have tried to precede legislation, or to avoid its cost, by creating national policy for children. The limitations in this approach come at implementation stage when policy lacks the authority of law. In an area where so many different statutory and non statutory bodies are involved in service provision, it is very difficult to ensure cooperation and convergence of efforts to serve the interests of the whole child, without the momentum and focus to activity that legislation brings. However legislation is expensive, requiring considerable commitments in human resource and consultative time in preparation. Caribbean countries should consider combining on the development of a regional model that can be appropriately adjusted at consultation stage in each individual country. If legislation incorporates the recommendations in the regional plan, the main thrust will be to enable structures and partnerships to emerge within a regulatory framework, forging links and establishing the basis on which funding can be sought to first meet priority needs, and secondly to plan a process over time for the eventual universalisation of ECED services.

2. Make legislative links with other laws affecting young children

A country's capacity to provide pre school education is generally enabled by provisions within Education Acts which allow for the extension of schooling to the years before formal school entry on a non statutory basis. Where these provisions apply, a country can to the best of their financial and human capacity provide pre school education in nursery schools, basic schools or other free standing pre school centres, or in nursery or kindergarten classes attached formally to primary schools. New legislation should not seek to separate this power granted under Education Acts, as it is solely an Education power, and frequently exercised by individual schools in the best interests of providing a community service. However new legislation should envision ECED arrangements from birth to school entry which integrate all the elements of whole child development, shape the changes required in existing provision to become integrated and empower new community provision which can operate alongside. In this model, the new legislation will recognise the current diversity in services, and provide the regulatory framework for ensuring progress towards integrated education and development approaches to be used throughout in the best interest of individual children.

3. Make links with other laws affecting the social and economic climate

Consideration will need to be given in most Caribbean countries to amendments to those laws and regulatory provisions which affect the capacity of parents to parent effectively. What flexibility does employment legislation allow for employees to breastfeed at least until a baby's sixth month? Paid maternity leave is one option, flexible working arrangements are another. What provisions exist for partner support of child care? Are there flexible employment arrangements for parental leave during the pre school years for child illness and clinic attendance? These questions go beyond the immediate concerns of employment and productivity, to the rights and best interests of children, to the status of women in a society and to the social climate being recreated to enable men to participate as nurturing parents.

4. Develop planning capacity for very young children

The Profiles Project in Jamaica serves as an interesting model for countries in the Region for developing planning instruments and institutionalising a system of data collection, analysis, and use in planning for young children. The Project which has completed its pilot stage is about to be funded by the IDB over the next three years until it is fully incorporated into the process of Jamaica's planning for children.

The original idea behind the Profiles Project was that at about the age of 6, at the moment that a child enters primary schooling, it would be useful to collect data both as representative of the actual status of children at this important point of change in their lives (a picture of the accumulation of their development to this point) and as a baseline for looking at what happens to them in school. Recognising that the causes for potential difficulty in school largely reside in environmental deficiencies rather than deficits existing within the child, it would be equally useful to develop a profile of the learning environments in which children find themselves in order that children's developmental status can be understood in relation to and in interaction with their learning contexts.

In developing what will be Child Status Profiles (data on the child's development at home from the parent, in a pre primary setting from the teacher/caregiver, from the health centre from the nurse, in the primary school from the teacher) and Profiles of Learning Environments (data on the learning environment in the home, the pre primary setting and the primary school) the Profiles Project aims to achieve five main purposes for planning for children (pre primary and primary aged, and at the point of transition between the two):

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- to enable a multi disciplinary approach to the planning of interventions
- to provide national pictures to lead, focus and evaluate policy
- to identify groups of children with specific needs
- to support appropriate curriculum development and tools
- to compare children's development, over time, in the specific context of Jamaica

The Project also opens up the possibilities for the Profiles to act as a starting point in a potential longitudinal study of the effects of pre primary provision, pre primary to primary transition and primary schooling in Jamaica. It also makes a dynamic link between the pictures emerging from data on health and nutrition status usually collected shortly after birth in most countries, and the anthropometric data collected on school entry and, later still, the data collected on achievement, repetition and drop put rates in primary schooling and beyond. The Profiles begin to inform us as to the processes at work in a period of critical and rapid development for children and indicate causal and underlying factors in child development and developmental outcomes.

One of the most useful lessons from the Profiles Project has been in the combined use of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Despite the complexities involved in human communication and the labour intensive methods of data collection from individual parents and teachers on a sample basis, the pictures which emerge give a richer basis on which to make interpretations and informed judgements in planning. One of the recommendations of the UNICEF CAO Draft Plan of Action (section 2) is for countries to ensure that they develop the capacity to plan, by identifying what they need to know and how they can be sure that their sources and methods are accurate in obtaining information. This is particularly important for all countries who are both economically constrained and struggling to alleviate if not eradicate poverty, for whom the questions as to who to target and where to target are paramount.

5. ECED interventions cannot work without planned social and economic supports

In all Caribbean countries, the need to address poverty eradication has produced commitments and plans of action. In communities that are the most starkly affected by poverty, it has proved almost impossible to construct sustainable solutions for the development of young children through the process of creating single focused ECED interventions. The Day Care innovations in the 1970s and the gains in pre school coverage during the same period prior to structural adjustment could not be sustained as centrally funded service provisions once the economy was cut back. For most countries in the Region, the 80s marked decimation in the provision of what services existed for ECED.

ECED interventions in these contexts of poverty cannot be seen ever again as interventions separate from strategies to create employment and training opportunities, to ensure safe water access and durable shelter, to build social institutions and common purposes which can resist social disintegration and violence, and to develop social attitudes and values in relation to parenting and nurturing practices amongst women and men.

In communities where **political or social tensions make it difficult to mobilise people** for activities that will be to their benefit, children can provide a rallying point for actions which promote consensus and organisation for the common good. From such a focus on children, both direct actions in support of ECED or indirect actions in support of community improvements in health, sanitation, nutrition and social organisation that benefit children are also likely to benefit parents, families and the wider community.[2]

The UNICEF CAO Draft Plan of Action (section 2) suggests important strategies and actions not only to build planning capacity but also to **select priority areas** in which to make interventions, interventions

[2] MYERS, R.G (1995) Early childhood care and development programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. IDB, Washington

which seek to **forge collaborative alliances** and serve as **models to inform** the devising of national programmes of interventions to follow. The **phasing of activities** suggested allows for countries to make an immediate start on a small scale in selected communities, an **important indication of intention and commitment** to 'get things right', whilst simultaneously developing data systems and poverty 'maps' to inform the delivery of programme interventions over a longer and **sustained period of time.**

Whilst the critical problems arising from poverty and violence have not (as yet) impacted with the same gravity on all Caribbean societies, the experience of those countries where **violence overshadows every aspect of living** in many communities has focused governments on the urgency to act. Recent research in Jamaica[3] in five poor urban areas revealed communities which are dominated by fear and distrust and often lack very basic forms of cooperation or communication. **Community institutions were identified as playing a critical role** either in maintaining the vicious cycle of poverty and violence or, more positively, in breaking that cycle. The study findings highlighted the need for interventions to build not just human capital but also social capital. Ultimately this is a community, rather than a policing solution.

Community participants identified projects and programmes that bring people together and build social capital as being by far the most important concrete solutions to violence: programmes such as community based activities, with **a particular emphasis on youth activities**, particularly by the youth themselves; and safe centres for counselling to reduce violence and **improve family and interpersonal communication**. Work and training opportunities were an equally important second priority amongst all groups interviewed. The lesson for all countries in the Region which may find this Jamaican picture uncomfortable close to home is that **diverse and focused interventions with community infrastructural supports,** such as those identified in this study, provide the necessary context for sustainable ECED interventions.

Second steps: what is being provided in the name of ECED ?

In this section we look at a number of forms of provision for ECED and the kinds of fora in society where supportive environments are needed to sustain provision. The most critical area of all is the local culture in which ECED is provided: what is the reality of the conditions and lifestyles in which children are born and raised? What is the climate of promotion for ECED provision? What stimulates demand for ECED provision and what is it about ECED provision that is particularly valued? Are there different perceptions of the needs and outcomes for ECED provision, and if so, how do these effect what is provided in the name of ECED?

ECED provision is **not simply a 'good thing'**, something that has been sought for eagerly, and when provided, actually achieves almost naturally the most beneficial outcomes for young developing children. Countries such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have created substantial ECED services for children three years and older, and in the case of Jamaica enrolment now exceeds 80% of that age group in the population. Yet critical questions in a recent evaluation of Jamaican basic school services arose about the quality of the provision and suggest that the vast majority of the service is **not based on developmentally sound principles**. What has happened and what are the implications for the future? If you were to take a hard look at the experiences of young children in ECED provision with which you are familiar, are you sure that you would feel that their experiences were providing them with an opportunity for beneficial development, let alone optimal development?

[3] MOSER and HOLLAND (1995) Urban poverty and violence in Jamaica. Preliminary findings of a study. World Bank, BDDC and UWI Centre for Population, Community and Development (later published in full 1996)

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One of the main recommendations in the UNICEF CAO Draft Plan of Action (section 3) suggests an important starting point for all of us; whether or not our countries are substantial ECED providers or operating only fledgling services. We need a practical, well informed, communicative basis on which to develop services, in which understandings about the real conditions of young children are shared with between policy makers and providers. In other countries of the world, **a period of sensitisation of policymakers** has preceded the development of culturally appropriate ECED services and initiatives at community level; one of the ways in which this has been done is to **appoint ECED specialists** in key governmental positions or to designate an NGO or development agency as the main lead agency in the sensitisation process.

1. Grounding ECED provision in local cultures

Creating a common language on the priorities for ECED is by no means simple and the time needed to do it effectively cannot be underestimated. Time needs to be spent examining the reasons why cultural forms and expectations have arisen in different societies and communities, and what this might mean for **how ECED provision is used**. For example research into how young males are socialised[4] undertaken in Dominica, Guyana and Jamaica, which has recently been followed up in St. Lucia and Grenada indicates a high level of contradiction and confusion in **child rearing practices which differentiate between boys and girls.** Research shows that traditional patterns of gender distinctions are central to child rearing and are revealed in parents' preferences at birth, the division of domestic chores, the sanctioned leisure activities, the preferred social values/skills, how discipline is practiced, how emotions are exhibited, and how children are prepared for sexuality. These patterns are in place from a child's birth and affect development from that point on. Daughters are protected for as long as possible, and education is seen as an extension of the protection provided in the home, keeping them 'on track' and resisting the onset of early sexual experiences and resulting pregnancy. However sons are encouraged to become independent and acquire skills they will need for economic survival; the high drop out rate from primary schools of boys in the poorest quintiles in Caribbean societies bear testimony to the more important roles that await them beyond the yard and school (where the women are) and in the streets, with the men. The research clearly demonstrates that the underlying causes for these gender distinctions lie in the wider economic and social spheres; **survival needs structure choices parents make** from the birth of their children, and the many voices of parents in the research echo the feeling of helplessness at the erosion of their authority in the face of the outcomes for their children. Countries need to have open channels of communication between communities, policy makers and specialist agencies to ensure that ECED initiatives are grounded in the actual realities of young children rather than those that are perceived.

2. Creating a climate of promotion of the value of ECED

How often do we have single issue campaigns that dominate public education for a specific time before dwindling away? Similarly, how many excellent initiatives have been taken on by existing education structures, absorbed as part of the curriculum, and become 'dead' study topics rather than skills for living and surviving? How can we articulate the importance of ECED at the levels where behaviours are likely to be affected - and especially promote attractive alternatives for young boys and higher outcomes for young girls? What steps can we take to involve the media in responsive and responsible ways to assist ECED promotion, and how can parents help their children understand what they see currently and resist its replication in their own lives? In what settings and at what stages in life are young people most receptive to learning about early childhood before they tumble into parenthood? Questions such as these need to be kept in the forefront of activities undertaken **to raise consciousness about ECED** and then to **sustain a climate of valuing ECED provisions.**

[4] BROWN, J et al (1995) and (1997) Gender Socialisation Project Reports, Caribbean Child Development Centre, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica.

The UNICEF CAO initiative in 1995 involving the media, education providers, community leaders and other interested groups in the process of defining beneficial characteristics in children's programming on television produced a project called Chi Chi Bud combining child rights, gender concerns, entertainment and information in a Caribbean model drawing on children's magazines, Sesame Street and popular cultural forms.

The Jamaican **Child to Child**[5] programmes, now integral to the primary curriculum, are designed to improve the child development knowledge and caretaking practices of primary school children, ages 9-12, and through them, the knowledge and practices of parents or guardians. Amongst the skills children learn are how to make toys and how to help younger children play with them so as to encourage their development. The action oriented curriculum includes role play, group discussions, demonstrations, drama and song, as well as toy making. Major benefits to younger siblings, older siblings, parents, guardians and teachers themselves extended beyond the scope of the Programme and into other areas, such as the improved knowledge of health and development that teachers gained and their introduction to new forms of teaching. However it has proved **difficult to sustain the vitality and basis in community action** of the approach as the Programme has gone to scale. In the process, parts of the pilot curriculum were rewritten and topics were dispersed throughout the regular curriculum so that the programme no longer retains its specific identity. Moreover, the "active learning" part of the curriculum has been weakened, as has the initial training of the teachers in this methodology and the specific content of the Child-to-Child programme. However, not only does this programme have beneficial developmental potential, it also provides a model of practice which is easily replicable and can 'go to scale; however, the experience of the Child to Child programme is also that it is important and difficult to sustain the key elements of the programme - its activity based learning methodologies and its specific focus in seeking to assist younger siblings and their families.

Main considerations in taking forward provision for ECED

1. Support and raise consciousness about ECED in parents of new born children

Following on from the experiences above, the proposed strategies for support to parents and children in the year after a child's birth in the UNICEF CAO Draft Plan of Action (section 5) suggest consciousness raising techniques for **campaigning on the value of extending mother child interaction** in the first few months of life and of the **nutritional and other benefits of breastfeeding to the young child**, set in the context of providing the primarily economic support structures parents need to devote the time required. Parents cannot be expected to value breastfeeding their babies over and above any necessity for mothers to earn the family income. This is **a critical area for the construction of social partnerships** in support of flexible arrangements for parents, the implementation cost of which (which may be in payments or temporary loss of full productivity) should be shared between employer and State.

2. Start ECED interventions in the first year of life for maximum benefit to the child

Programmes which integrate home visiting, child development support and parent education interventions in areas of extreme poverty have been successful in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the world (notably Turkey) **if they have sustained high quality in each area of intervention**. The evaluation of the programme in Turkey demonstrated that the impact of the improved parenting skills was still measurably strong when the subjects were found ten years later - measures such as higher participation of the father in family life, higher grade achievement and better school performance of the

[5] WRIGHT and GRANTHAM-McGREGOR (1985) Using Primary School Children to Improve Child Rearing Practices in Rural Jamaica, Child: Care, Health and Development, No.11, pp95-113

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students. [6] The implications for developing strategies are that each part of the programme needs to be in place, **the approach needs to be integrated** and the supports offered must be of high quality. Programmes which have not taken such an integrated approach cannot generate sustained benefits to parents for future children, or to children for future development. What is important is the dynamic between the programme elements. Many community health services in the Region developed home visiting and parent education programmes in the 1970s. Many of these have suffered from the same decimating forces as Day Care in the 1980s. However, models developed subsequently elsewhere in the world have proved to be more sustainable in a combined use of trained professionals, para professionals and parents working at community level. Critically the cost benefit is greatest when the supporting environment has been addressed: the initiatives to alleviate poverty, to provide training and employment opportunities, to build social organisations and to promote a climate of valuing ECED supports mentioned in the sections above.

As you will see from an accompanying paper to this conference, Why do children of the Caribbean need programmes of Early Childhood Education and Development?, there are **very strong scientific, human rights, social, moral, economic, programme efficacy, social equity and political arguments** for starting ECED programme interventions in the first year of a child's life. There are arguments which are just as strong for **ensuring that parents have the knowledge** and the skills to use, organise and benefit from such programmes. For parents, access to the knowledge they require at this stage, and the understanding of their role as primary facilitators and intermediaries in the education of their children will serve to strengthen their parenting in future years. **One of the most misleading impressions parents can be given is that education is primarily the function of the school**, and is a fundamentally mysterious process that only teachers properly understand. It is amazing how pervasive this view of the teacher is in the Caribbean today, given the rates of underachievement and drop out, and how reflective this view is of **parents' own lack of confidence in themselves as educators** rather than any realistic view of what miracles a teacher can perform in (apparent) isolation from the profoundly influential impact on the child of of family, community and the wider society .

3. Sustain ECED supports to the child and family in the years before preschool

The UNICEF CAO Draft plan of action suggests specific strategies and actions to build on the ECED interventions in a child's first year of life, and specifically addresses the need for early childhood/child care centres offering high quality and accessible services to parents, particularly those who need the support in order to work. However, it is clear from experience across developing and developed countries that high quality formal programmes of this nature are expensive (in staff/child ratios particularly) and are not always used to capacity if not established to meet family needs (times of operation and affordability being key issues), cultural expectations and learning outcomes (especially as regards preparation for school).

Day Care provision as we generally recognise it in this Region is understaffed by any standard or example of minimal quality provision in the developed world. It is a presumption to begin a debate about quality in our provisions without first addressing the seriousness of the lack of human resources, trained and apprentice, paid and volunteer. Our staff/child ratios would be considered dangerous in inner city London or New York and the provision deregistered if not immediately improved. **Day care providers first and foremost are helping parents survive; a second priority is to assist children to develop**. How many parents privately pray just that their children will be kept safely (and fed) until they return? In times of little choice within a price range and limited opening times, how many parents would consider it a plus if the provision offered anything more of a developmental nature? How vital it is to offer parents support and sufficient knowledge to complement the deficits in the present day care provisions that their children attend!

[6] KAGITCIBASI, BEKMAN and GOKSEL (1995) A multi purpose model of non formal education in Coordinators Notebook (No.18), The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, New York.

Home based day care provides a cheaper, informal service to parents, with considerable benefits in higher ratios and greater communication between parents and providers. In some developed countries, the systems for support, licensing, training and standardising home based day care providers for the needs of children before pre school age has been prioritised over the development of day care services because of the greater potential for affordable and accessible arrangements, closer interaction between parent and provider, provider and child, smaller family and community community context and closer cultural links. However the **combination of investments in support, regulation and training is vital** to achieve a minimal level of quality in home based care , and providers themselves generally see the investment as one with limited personal returns beyond a few years of operating. Home based day carers benefit from the support and training received and often move on to other areas of social welfare work, a process which creates a structural need to live with high turnover and to build budget capacity to address it.

What is clear for all children in poverty, and particularly for those whose parents are working, is that the services which are used to care for them provide for both their educational and developmental needs. It is for us to consider if we are able to do this better formally or informally, in centres or in home based care, in a number of different ways according to local variations or through a standard model or policy arrangement. What we also have to consider is how we support, train, monitor and regulate providers, and how identify indicators of minimal quality below which provision will not be licensed. For those of you who have looked at the exercise on Defining High Quality Provision written for this conference, you will see that any provision that cannot meet a minimal level of quality will discourage if not arrest a child's development, and in that scenario, we have to be able to ask ourselves why we are continuing to allow it to be provided any longer.

4. Prioritise quality improvements in pre school services

There are many contributions being made at this conference addressing experiences in pre school settings, and the supports both within and surrounding pre school services which constrain or enable them to develop quality. One of the greatest constraining factors is the same as that found in day care services: the **sheer scale of the human resource needs in the service** from specialised training, to ongoing supervision and direction, to ensuring the appropriate age related staff child ratios in order to function in the interests of child development, again to a minimal level. How many teachers in Caribbean preschool settings are able to answer a unreserved "YES" to the two questions devised by Lilian Katz and included in the note on defining quality:

> "Are working conditions adequate to encourage me to enhance my knowledge, skills and career commitment?"
>
> "Am I usually treated with respect and understanding?"

The strategies for supporting quality improvements will of necessity **rely on social partnerships** caught up in a classic Catch 22 situation:

- **Training** of staff will need clarity of competencies and accreditation procedures to meet service standards and will rely on **staff child ratios** to put training to good effect;
- **staff child ratios** rely on resource commitments from **funding providers** such as parents' **fees**, government subsidies, income generation activities and sponsorship from the private sector;
- **funding providers** rely on **returns** for their money in terms of human productivity (higher levels of education in the workforce of the future, greater reliability of parents in

the workforce today), reduction in health costs because a preventive measure is in place, reduction of inefficiency in the school system by reducing repetition, drop out and remedial programmes, social stability (reduction of costs related to social welfare and crime) and resulting savings which can be reinvested;

- **returns** on the investment in pre school services rely on the sustainability of **well managed, quality** provision;

- **well managed quality** provision relies on the reinvestment of returns in order than teachers can be trained and will in turn.....

It is within this context that individual countries **need to analyse their coverage** of the preschool population, in the one to two years leading up to primary school entrance. In setting goals for coverage (three and four year olds living in poverty; full time access for all children in need by the year 2000; or, a place for every three year old part time and every four year old full time by the year 2010 etc) it is critical for child development and sustainability of the ECED service offered that **countries do not lose sight of the quality equation**. The lessons of pre school evaluations in Trinidad and Tobago (described later today) and in Jamaica suggest that it is best not to start ECED provision until local models have been developed and evaluated, and until the **process of 'going to scale' can be managed effectively** to ensure the full development potential of the service being offered to children.

The UNICEF CAO Draft Plan of Action (section 7) offers key goals and strategies for addressing the need to promote children's learning and development in pre school settings. Every element is important in **securing the development of children**: pedagogical guidelines for staff based on a validated curriculum, partnership with parents to ensure common understandings and purposes in the defining and delivery of quality services, training towards competencies and accreditation for staff, lay inspection and advisory services to ensure community feedback to providers and government, development of physical plant resources to maximise variety in learning experiences for whole child development, and ensuring staff child ratios promote development rather than being the main obstacle in its way.

At the heart of a successful curriculum for children are the **complementary approaches of child centred learning and the forging of communicative partnerships with parents**. We cannot get it right in pre school settings if these two goals are not constantly guiding practice. In each pre school setting these goals need to be defined, their meanings for strategies and implementing activities articulated and shared between parents and staff, and strategies developed which will ensure that they are kept to the forefront of the development of the service offered. How successful in terms of developmental outcomes for children is the service's implementation of child centres methodologies? How far have we integrated psycho social aspects into the curriculum? How informed and 'connected' are individual parents despite their limited availability because of work and the multiple hardships in their lives? We are not insisting that they come and participate, are we? How sure can we be that we have found effective ways of reporting back to parents and involving them in joint planning with us for the development of their child? **Can we be sure that our provision ensures development of children** at least to a minimum level, and is progressing to a higher level framed by the realistic goals for our context and our times? **If not, why are we doing it this way at all?**

Third steps: how is ECED being supported and sustained?

1. Taking an integrated approach to ECED

You will hear discussion at this conference about the ways in which **services and supports need to be integrated** in order to ensure their capacity for affecting whole child development. Integration can be used to describe the process of service management, the collective efforts of service providers, and

the access that families have to all the services and supports it needs to ensure integrated development of individual children. It is the **process which maximises the potential for social partnerships** in support of ECED development at the national level, **underlies the framework for public and parent education** initiatives and **reflects most accurately the rhythms of how very young children learn and develop**. Development of the very young child does not proceed smoothly through subjects or areas or stages; it works on all planes at once, vulnerable to the absence of climates of safety, security, affection and acceptance, and responsive to positive interactions with adults and children in environments which allow them choices and structured learning. The UNICEF CAO Draft Plan of Action identifies integration goals at the levels of the family of the young child, of the local services provided in ECED, and of the management at national level of the processes of capacity building, streamlining of government functions, investment (in service quality, expansion and planning) and transition to primary school.

A critical issue is how the integration 'tone' is set. As you will see in other papers at the conference, integration is not a catch all or end point ; rather it describes a continuing and dynamic process in working arrangements. At the level of service management, it has been interpreted in a range of developing countries to mean either **cooperation** between governments and agencies, **coordination** of service and supports at local level, or **convergence** of responsibilities under single management[7]. As the Draft plan of action summarises, practical experience has demonstrated the effectiveness of integration within a single Ministry (with responsibility for all ECED services) but not without designated (additional) capacity and strong political support. In the absence of these elements, although cooperation has proved to be slower route to integration, it is less challenging to the existing framework or structures for service delivery. What is significant in the experience cited by Bob Myers is that whatever approach is taken at national level, it is important for effective integration at community level that all the elements (preventive health care, ECED provision, structural, social and economic supports) are combined with a **devolution of decision making power** to **generate community participation** and ownership, and to assist individuals within communities to demand and 'fit together' the services that they need.

2. Designating budgets and planning investment for ECED

Country representatives attending the Belize Conference were provided with a clear analysis of the relationship between the development of their national budgets and their capacity for providing for their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF CAO, 1996: Annex 7). The very **grave situation in which families of young children** find themselves sharpens the urgency for ECED supports: in much of the English speaking Caribbean, **one in three children is living in poverty**. Although traditionally child rearing has been a role ascribed to one gender in the home context, increasingly it is the **women who head 30-40%** of the region's households and whose participation in the labour force steadily increases. Where women are not able to get employment, their ability to maintain their means of existence and that of their children is imperiled.

The circle in which poor children find themselves is a vicious one. Children from poor families often fall quickly and progressively behind their more advantaged peers in their readiness for school and life, and that gap is never closed. In fact, there is strong evidence throughout the region that **budget planning has tended to foster this increasing divide between the rich and the poor** by targeting greater resource allocations in the tertiary and secondary sectors (where there is an almost total absence of young males and a tiny minority of females from the poorest quintile in society), and within those sectors, in the more academic and in the privately run institutions (where there is an almost total absence of young males and a tiny minority of females from the poorest fifth of society). Governments have been urged to commit to the 20:20 principle whereby Basic Social Services (for human development) are jointly funded on a basis of a minimum designation of 20% of government budget and 20% of development

[7] MYERS, R.G (1995) Early childhood care and development programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. IDB, Washington

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assistance from donor countries. **Governments need to keep adequate expenditure records** to allow for the kind of budget analysis that illuminates the basis on which the 20:20 compact can work. Without **a rigorous budget review process**, and **complementary effective targeting of resources** governments will not be able to plan equitable distribution of resources to ensure **equality of access to ECED supports for those who need them most**.

In the UNICEF CAO Draft Plan of Action, and in the accompanying paper on the rationale for ECED programmes, **the basis for investment in ECED supports and services is shown to be in the future pay off**. That pay off has been estimated to be three to four fold in the developing world, and as much as sevenfold amongst poor populations in the developed. In the Highscope/Perry Preschool longitudinal study [1] in the USA, the test group and control groups were interviewed at 27 years old and with corroborating independent data the study revealed that the experimental group had 1/5 to 1/3 the arrests of the control group, received less welfare assistance in their adult lives, had higher school achievement and literacy scores, had 1/3 more numbers graduate from high school, made more longlasting marriages, had fewer out of wedlock births and displayed greater social responsibility. Not only does the child experience long term benefits; **ECED programmes enable immediate benefits** in increasing labour force participation by women, and freeing older siblings to go to school or to get a job.

Governments need to review their ECED budget allocations, **streamline budget votes to eliminate duplication and waste** (this is one of the stronger arguments for integration at national level) and establish an equitable basis on which to fund existing provisions and **to attract new funds** for improving and expanding coverage as targeted. In the conference tomorrow a paper will be presented that develops this process further.

3. Monitoring, evaluating and training for quality in ECED

Throughout this contribution the **systems needed** for monitoring, evaluation and training have been emphasised as **integral to the processes** recommended - legislation, planning, targeting the poor, public and parenting education, ECED provisions and supports, integration approaches and budget allocations. Governments need to establish embryonic systems where none currently exist (or refocus those that do but which do not lend themselves to disaggregation of ECED statistics) and underpin them with **baseline recording procedures** at the level of provider and community and **'think tank' capacity** for ongoing research and evaluation at policy level. This is an area where **a regional approach** would reduce in country expenditure on system design and would serve to attract regional donor funding for priorities arising from the production of data on both country and regional trends.

Training occupies the considerations of a number of papers and workshop contributions at this conference, and this contribution serves mainly to emphasise the need for **an overarching and coherent system** of training, which incorporates development of validated curricula, competency and accreditation procedures, in service and pre service models using workplace and distance learning techniques, and which identifies accessible progression routes between each level. Such a system would benefit from being established **at a regional level** to standardise and streamline the expense of accreditation and qualification procedures, and supported at the national level in the provision of diverse curricula to meet local conditions and cultural expectations. One of the strategies suggested in the UNICEF CAO Draft Plan of Action is for the construction of a **training route that connects** the first base community parent education training with ECED competency training, followed by access into teacher and ECED leadership training; in an equitable system, each participating 'carer' or 'educator' of young children should be able to opt for training and knowledge acquisition which can access him or her **to the highest levels of ECED training outcomes** if so desired and enabled.

[1] HIGHSCOPE Educational Foundation (1964/1992) Study of 123 African Americans born in poverty

In conclusion: the main considerations for sustaining support to ECED

This paper is a **contribution to work in progress** in the region, work that will be complemented by the compilation of country 'pictures' giving both quantitative and qualitative assessments of the state of ECED supports and provisions in your countries, and progressed by the recommendations which will flow from this conference and which will form the basis of both regional level cooperation and country level planning in the Draft Plan of Action. In each area that we have identified there is a need to identify or create the means whereby ECED ceases to be a marginal and optional endeavour of a few in a society, and becomes part of the normal lifeblood and cultural expectations of families and communities in every country in the region. As the participant at the Belize conference reminds us, the care and protection of children is *everybody's business* ; in this region we think that we can create a balanced strategy of regional cooperation and national activity, which will both harness necessary supports and empower local capacities to take forward ECED initiatives in the interests of the rights of each child from birth.

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